

Prayer Meeting

SOBRIETY, THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS.

Week Beginning Oct. 17. 1 Thes. 5:5-8.

The Thessalonian Christians were being comforted with heartening assurances of our Lord's second coming. The special occasion of this was the desire of soothing the hearts of those who had suffered the loss of dear ones. The departed loved ones are spoken of as "them which are asleep" and loving hearts were not to sorrow as "others which have no hope." For a fundamental truth upon which their faith was built was "that Jesus died and rose again" and this involved the other gracious truth that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

He assures them that their attitude toward their Lord's coming was to be very different. While they could not know the day nor the hour they were not to be taken at unawares or found unprepared. They were "not in darkness," or ignorance, that the day of his coming should overtake them as a thief. They were the "children of light." That is, they knew the truth, and as wise and faithful servants they should be prepared for their Master's return and live in anticipation of it. Spiritual illumination affects the heart as well as the intellect. It was therefore expected of them that they should cultivate and cherish such motives and affections as would prepare them for welcoming their Lord at his coming.

"Sleep" here signifies worldly apathy to spiritual interests. Against this believers were warned. They were children of the day. They were therefore not only to be informed but to be active. Those who sleep, sleep in the night; being children of the day they were to be alert to spiritual exercises. Special emphasis is placed on the grace of watchfulness. Reference is made to watching for the Lord's appearing, but when we understand what constitutes this watchfulness we find that it consists in cultivating and cherishing the Christian graces and rendering faithful service. Night is the time when sleepers sleep and drunkards indulge in revelry. It is the symbol of idleness and excess. "Children of the day" are to be diligent and sober. To sleep in the day would imply indolence and to be drunken in the day would imply extreme shamelessness. "Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober."

The three graces that are here mentioned as characteristic of Christian sobriety are faith, hope and love. These graces are here represented under the symbol of armor, as in Ephesians 6. Here the armor mentioned is exclusively defensive, while there it is both defensive and offensive. It is that which is needed as a means of being guarded against being surprised by the day of the Lord as a thief in the night.

This defensive armor consists of "the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." The breastplate and helmet of the ancient warrior defended two vital parts, the heart and the head respectively. With heart and head protected the soldier was comparatively secure. With heart and head right, the entire Christian character is right. The head needs to be kept from error and the heart from impurity.

The breastplate here represents both faith and love, for not only is love an exercise of the heart but "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Mere intellectual conviction is not faith. The devils believe and tremble. Faith, as the motive power within, and love exercising and expressing itself in outward conduct, constitute personal righteousness.

In Ephesians 6 the helmet represents salvation; here it represents the hope of salvation. Sometimes the Scriptures represent salvation as present, sometimes as future. In this passage it is the perfected state of the soul that is referred to. In Isaiah 59:17, it is said of Christ as intercessor that "he put on righteousness as a breastplate and an helmet of salvation upon his head." By virtue of our legal and spiritual union with him we possess both the breastplate and the helmet.

Faith accepts and cherishes the assurance that our Lord is coming again. Love delights in fond anticipation of his coming and prompts to devoted service, while hope buoys up

the soul in tranquil expectancy, for "if we hope for that which we see not then do we with patience wait for it."

Young People's Societies

CAUSES OF LIFE'S FAILURES.

Topic for Sunday, October 24: Why Some Men and Women Do Not Succeed in Life. Joshua 1:19.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: Idle habits. Proverbs 10:4, 5, 26; 20:4, 13.

Tuesday: Faithlessness. Matthew 25:14-30.

Wednesday: Injustice. Psalm 1:4-6; 11:4-7.

Thursday: What is success? Luke xii:16-21.

Friday: True success. 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Saturday: Lack of perseverance. Hebrews 12:14-17.

Much depends upon a correct definition of failure and success. Some failures are successes and some successes are failures.

Failure is, strictly, that permanent or final failing which marks the end of an effort or a career. A certain kind of success may produce it.

Success is, strictly, that permanent or final triumph which marks the end of an effort or a career. And sometimes preceding failures produce it.

It is a false statement that "nothing succeeds like success." The conditions which call out the most robust qualities in man or woman, mature people or young people are usually the opposite of what the world calls successful.

Antacus, in his wrestling with Hercules, as the myth goes, derived fresh strength from Mother Earth each time that he was thrown, and had he touched the earth often enough he would have won. Hercules found it out and kept him from the ground.

Our antagonist is shrewd when he keeps us from a consciousness or experience of our weakness. Elated with a sense of our ability and proud of our achievements, we are his easy prey. We may reverse Paul's words, and say, "When I am strong, then am I weak."

Having planned well, which is of the first importance, success or failure turns on our constancy or inconstancy, diligence or idleness, faith or faithlessness, courage or timidity, perseverance or yielding, seeking the strength of the Lord or depending upon our own.

The lack of these elements, constancy, industry, trust, courage, perseverance, prayer to a higher power, is really a lack of character, and character lies back of all real success. Without it prosperity is but a beautiful and alluring path leading to an unseen pitfall.

One reason why some fail is that they are chronic complainers. Nothing is ever just quite right, circumstances are always against them, they are not appreciated, a cloud is over them all the time. To these the best and only advice is a ringing call to get out in the sunlight and battle off the circumstances. There's not a single promise in all God's word to a whiner!

The tonic of cheerfulness and resoluteness is that which invigorates the soul and stirs it to successful action. The man who says, "The world owes me a living, and I intend to roll up my sleeves and collect the debt," will succeed a hundred times while the man of depressed spirits lies supinely upon his back.

Lack of cheerfulness grows out of lack of faith. God has said, "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou discouraged: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." With the Lord God Almighty as his strength and support, what fear need any one have that he will not succeed? "The Lord is my strength and song."

Paul and Silas sang praises in the thick darkness of the midnight hour and down in the dungeon of the jail. People outside might have called them failures. But they knew better. The Lord was their "refuge and strength." They knew that they could do all things through Christ. They patiently and joyfully awaited his hour, which would be their hour. And their waiting was not in vain. God in his own good time, shakes the walls which imprison those who trust him. He will not let them fail!